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ABSTRACT

This study of a high school in Washington, D.C. is about representation, or imaging, and its effect on the academic performance of African American adolescents. The school had an enrollment of 1,886 students in October 1982 as the study began. The inquiry explored African American culturally and politically constructed views of blackness and studied how students who do well were able to do so. The self-consciously contrived response of African Americans to school is an example of how students seek to retain and reclaim a Black Self while concurrently embracing a world ordered by the dominant society. Narratives presented in this ethnography are evidence of the dilemma these students face. Representations of the Black Self as "Other" are powerful deterrents to the academic success of African American students. This study indicates that African American students perceive the pen, the act of writing, as the quintessential instrument of representation, appropriation, and oppression. Narratives show how the formal school curriculum and its omissions and deletions are implicated in the development of student identities, and how students resist this fraudulent construction. (Contains 1 table and 461 references.) (SLD)

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